

Iraq/Afghanistan Veterans Laud Mitchell for Pressing for Updated Tuition and Fees Information

SCOTTSDALE - After pressure from U.S. Rep. Harry E. Mitchell, the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) has finally published eagerly awaited updates to tuition and fees reimbursement charts for hundreds of thousands of GI Bill beneficiaries, a month after the changes were due.

"As a former high school teacher, I find this is especially disturbing," said Mitchell, Chairman of the House Committee on Veterans' Affairs Subcommittee on Oversight and Investigations. "The education that our veterans have earned must not be delayed, nor comprised because the VA has failed to provide veterans with the necessary information they need to make informed decisions about the benefits they have earned."

Currently, the VA has a statutory requirement (38 USC 3313(c)(1)(A)) to publish an updated [tuition and fees reimbursement chart](#) for students who wish to take advantage of GI bill education benefits by August 1st. However, this year, VA missed the deadline, and as of last week, had yet to publish the tuition and fees schedule for GI Bill beneficiaries. The VA finally released the [tuition and fees reimbursement chart](#) on Monday.

Mitchell's efforts drew attention and praise from Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans of America (IAVA), the nation's first and largest group dedicated to the veterans of the wars in Iraq Afghanistan.

"Congressman Mitchell once again went to bat for student veterans everywhere by reminding the VA that not completing their GI Bill homework on time is unacceptable," said Patrick Campbell, Legislative Counsel for IAVA, which rates Mitchell among their to 13 most effective members of Congress on veterans issues. "I don't think it was a coincidence that a day after the VA received a letter from Congressman Mitchell that the VA finally posted the new GI Bill rates, exactly a month late."

In 2008, Congressman Mitchell teamed up with Senator Jim Webb of Virginia to pass the Post-9/11 GI Bill to provide enhanced educational benefits to veterans with active duty service, including men and women serving in the National Guard and Reserves, on, or after, September 11 2001. President Bush signed the Webb-Mitchell GI Bill into law on June 30, 2008. . Since

August 2009, the VA has issued Post 9/11 G.I. Bill benefits to almost 310, 000 student veterans. Approximately 1,100 students at Arizona State University are using the benefit, according to university officials.

Since World War II, our nation has offered education benefits to returning veterans. Under the first GI Bill, passed in 1944, nearly 8 million veterans earned an education. Though Congress has passed other versions of the GI Bill since then, the value of the education benefit has declined. The Webb-Mitchell GI Bill is designed to cover more educational expenses for service members, including Guardsmen and Reservists, such as a living allowance, money for books and the ability to transfer unused educational benefits to spouses or children. Additionally, veterans would have up to 15 years after they leave active duty to use these benefits.

The bill also includes a Yellow Ribbon G.I. Bill Education Enhancement Program which assists eligible veterans in covering tuition expenses that exceed the highest public in-state undergraduate tuition rate. As a part of the program, schools agree to cover up to 50 percent of the tuition that the Post-9/11 G.I. Bill does not cover. As August 4, 2010, the VA has approved approximately 3,200 Yellow Ribbon Program agreements with over 1,100 schools for the upcoming academic year, including Arizona State University.

Below is the text of Mitchell's letter to Secretary Shinseki.

August 26, 2010

VIA FACSIMILE

Hon. Secretary Eric K. Shinseki

U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs

810 Vermont Avenue NW

Washington, DC 20420

Dear Secretary Shinseki,

I am seriously concerned that the VA failed to make the August 1st deadline to publish the updated [tuition and fees reimbursement chart](#) for GI Bill beneficiaries.

Hundreds of thousands of student veterans, preparing to start school this upcoming academic year, will have an incomplete understanding of much of their tuition the GI Bill benefits will cover.

As you know, the August 1st deadline was mandated by Congress to help student veterans and schools prepare for the upcoming school year. VA's statutory requirement to determine the highest in-state, undergraduate, public tuition is specified in 38 USC 3313(c)(1)(A).

As a former high school teacher, I find this is especially disturbing. The education that our veterans have earned must not be delayed, nor comprised because the VA has failed to provide veterans with the necessary information they need to make informed decisions about the benefits they have earned.

This is simply unacceptable. Veteran's benefits are earned, and the VA has a solemn obligation to provide these benefits on time.

I would like to know when, specifically, the VA plans to fulfill its legal obligation and finally publish the new [tuition and fees reimbursement chart](#) for student veterans.

Thank you for your assistance. I look forward to your reply.

Sincerely,

Harry E. Mitchell

Member of Congress

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